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## PAINTINGS BY EARLY AMERICAN ARTISTS

FROM REEDY'S *Mirror*—BY PINX

A worth while picture exhibition is that of early American masters at the City Art Museum. Not great masters (perhaps not masters of painting at all), but yet men of very creditable powers, almost of genius, were West and Copley, Stuart, Sully, Chester Harding, who compose the group exemplified. Think how very impossible it would be to repeat or parallel their achievements now, and you have a better point of view for understanding of their real worth. Think how impossible that any one ever again should have their outlook, how rare the feeling that they express; how rare and how genuine.

Untaught, they also were untutored; nothing for them to unlearn. They probably had no theories, about art for art's sake; were not conscious of belonging to any art movement. They never learned to paint inanities. They revered beauty, but knew not how to dissect it, to analyze, synthesize and reiterate, nor to dazzle with the premier coup. Only the fundamental humanity of their work saves it from the limbo. But what a saving grace that is! Through sympathy they were interpretative—not sympathy with themselves, but the sympathy that feels out, that opens the eyes, that dedicates the spirit, that makes devotion. By devoted industry they grasped enough of the power of expression so that they could suggest to us their visions.

How direct and straightforward, therefore, is Copley in his portrait of Mrs. Thomas Dongan. How characterful the figure; how beautiful, too, the composition of the draperies. The man knew that he had something to say, and though he said it to our unsophisticated ancestors, the same qualities that appealed to them still are fresh and beautiful to us, the more so after all the sophistications and meticolations of the movements and the schools.

The schools, you see, cut no Gordian knots, but only tell you how to do ("in your own way," of course, a very clever way) that which somebody else has done. Copley told himself, and so kept his original quality from the beginning to the end, and he painted good pictures in America before ever he went to London and to Benjamin West.

And West, too, in the exhibition grows upon one. True, West more than begins to be sophisticated, but beneath this there is a simple soul in his work. His compositions of "The Holy Spirit Descending Upon Christ After His Baptism in the River Jordan" and "He That Is Without Sin Among You, Let Him Cast the First Stone at Her," among others shown, have qualities of mastery. As for Stuart and Sully, their success with portraiture is a perpetual challenge to the pretentiousness of art. And Chester Harding, house and sign painter, who suddenly discovered he could paint portraits, and straightway painted a hundred distinguished fellow citizens in six months or so, "charging twenty-five dollars each." How simple the way this man went at his work. How unabashed by the mysteries. How modest

and delightful in his discovery of himself, when with sign painter's materials he had perpetrated his first "portrait" of his wife. "The moment I saw the likeness, I became frantic with delight; it was like the discovery of a new sense. I could think of nothing else." He didn't need to; he had become a portrait painter; experience did the rest.

Of course, it were ungrateful to belittle the technical accomplishments of nowadays American art, which has come up shoulder to shoulder with the most advanced of the nations. But, for fundamental qualities, we well may turn our eyes again and again to the American primitives. And while we enjoy their very genuine delightfulness we can not help feeling that technique is not art.

## SOCIETY OF WESTERN ARTISTS' ANNUAL EXHIBITION OPENS

FROM THE *Globe-Democrat*, December 6, 1914

The City Art Museum will open this morning the nineteenth annual exhibition of the Society of Western Artists. The collection will continue on view every day during December, from 10 a. m. until 5 p. m.

Together with this new collection, which is representative of the art production of the West, the museum opened another exhibition by George Aid, the St. Louis etcher, who displays forty-four etchings and four paintings. Aid is a young St. Louis artist who has attracted wide attention. At the beginning of his career he was honored by the International Jury of the World's Fair by the award of a silver medal, and since then he has become recognized among the country's prominent workers in art.

The other important special exhibition for December at the City Art Museum is of paintings by Sir Benjamin West, the American president of the British Royal Academy; John Singleton Copley and several other eighteenth century American artists, whose works are a revelation to people who little realize that this country has had an art history.

The Western Society exhibition is one of the important annual displays at the City Art Museum. It is selected every year by a jury of representative artists from the local chapters in St. Louis, Chicago, Cincinnati and Indianapolis, who meet in one of these cities, to which artists all over the West send their pictures in hopes of their selection. Of several hundred sent this year, 121 examples were selected by the jury, representing seventy-seven of the notable artists of the West. Artists of the Southwest are represented in the St. Louis chapter, and a strong painting by Frank Reaugh, of Oak Cliff, Tex., is among the expressive interpretations of nature from the St. Louis group.

The annual prize of \$500 given by the Fine Arts Building Association of Chicago has been awarded to pictures by Herman H. Wessel, Oliver Dennett Grover, Pauline Palmer, Carl Gustav Waldeck and Gustav von Schlegell. Waldeck and Von Schlegell are St. Louisans.